

A Few Notes on Parliamentary Procedure

“Calling the question”

Calling the question (or properly, “Move the Previous Question”) is a motion to prevent any further debate on a question. It is not debatable and requires a 2/3 vote for passage. Adoption means that the previous question is immediately voted on. Moving the Previous Question is usually unnecessary, as the chair, given the chance, will put the question to the assembly once he or she sees that no other members are seeking the floor. Making the motion for the previous question is out of order without first being recognized by the chair. In short: don't use this motion unless your intention is to stifle debate.

Lay on the Table/Postpone Definitely/Postpone Indefinitely

Lay on the Table: A motion to Lay on the Table (or just “table”) is used to temporarily set aside a pending question in order to attend to an urgent matter. It is not debatable and requires a majority vote. Once a motion has been laid on the table, it only comes before the assembly again by means of an explicit motion to Take from the Table during the current meeting or the next meeting (after which the motion dies). In particular, a motion which has been laid on the table, does not automatically come up again under “Old Business” at the next meeting. The motion to Postpone Definitely (see below) is usually what is actually desired.

Postpone Definitely: The motion to Postpone Definitely or to Postpone to a Certain Time is used to delay further consideration of a pending question until a later time during the current meeting or (more commonly) until the next meeting, at which it automatically becomes pending under “Old Business.” It is debatable and requires a majority vote. A motion cannot be postponed past the next regularly scheduled meeting (but it can be repeatedly postponed).

Postpone Indefinitely: The motion to Postpone Indefinitely is used to kill a motion that has been brought before the assembly but which it is undesirable to act upon by means of either adoption or rejection (e.g., questions relating to sensitive issues that the body wishes to take no stand on). It is debatable and requires a majority vote.

“Friendly Amendments”

A “friendly amendment” (a request that the maker of a motion agree to a modification of his or her motion) can only be made before the chair has opened the floor to debate. After debate has begun, the motion belongs to the Council, not the mover, and can only be modified with the assent of the Council. Instead of asking the maker of a motion consent to amend it, if an amendment is desired which is likely to be universally agreed upon, a member should instead say “I ask unanimous consent to amend the motion by” If any member objects, then the amendment proceeds as usual, with a second followed by debate.

Parliamentary Inquiry

A Parliamentary Inquiry is used to direct a question to the chair (who can then refer the question to the parliamentarian, if desired) regarding a matter of procedure. If you want to accomplish something, but don't know how best to go about achieving it, you should raise a Parliamentary Inquiry.

The Parliamentarian

The parliamentarian is charged with assisting the chair and the Council to ensure the orderly and fair transaction of business. In most circumstances, the parliamentarian does not speak directly to the Council, but instead gives advice privately to the chair, unless the chair obtains unanimous consent to have the parliamentarian address the Council or the assembly votes by a 2/3 majority to suspend the rules and ask the parliamentarian's opinion directly. While the Council is in session, all parliamentary questions should be addressed to the chair.

While not in session, however, the parliamentarian should be considered a resource from whom any member of the Council or its committees can seek advice.

The current parliamentarian for the Columbia College Council is:

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